

**VOL
30**

Number Three
December 2017



the CANORA CHRONICLE

Capturing history - Building community

The Canadian Northern Society and
The Canora Chronicle Newsletter
celebrate 30 years this year!



*To honour our commitment of
'Capturing history and Building community'
we will be showcasing each of our sites
with a special up-close look at the sites
as they are today. See the enclosed
insert and enjoy a look at our
Meeting Creek Station and
Grain Elevator Park site.*

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS DUE JANUARY 2018.

Full Membership dues
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Please mail your dues (in Canadian
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Membership dues qualify as a Canadian
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Thank You for your support!



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Acknowledgements

The executive of the Canadian Northern Society would like to thank all of its members and friends who so generously honoured the memory of charter director, and long-time volunteer Mr. Bruce I. Smith. Their cash donations in his memory, and support for Glenys and family following his passing in June were appreciated. Special acknowledgment to Leslie S. Kozma who led the moment of silence in Bruce's memory at the October Society Executive meeting. It was clearly evident this past summer the significant amount of volunteer time that Bruce gave our organization year after year at Camrose and Meeting Creek. He is missed but at the same time thoughtfully remembered.

Thank you to Margaret Levesque, long time member from Big Valley, AB, for her very generous cash donation to the Canadian Northern Society's preservation efforts at Big Valley.

BIG VALLEY REVIEW

Winter is upon us as I write this on November 3rd. It has been another successful season at the Big Valley Station thanks to my small pool of go-to people. Phyllis and Wayne Garrison took great care of the station and grounds once again this year and are now headed to the sunny south. The yard and station looked great all season for the Alberta



Photo © S. I. Smith

Prairie trains. Eddie Finucane continues to keep an eye on things as well and lets me know if anything needs to be done. The station continues to be used for public gatherings and events including use as a command post for a Bears paw Petroleum mock disaster. The Village has a group of folks who are looking at ways to attract people to the community. Big Valley will be decorating downtown with lights, and as well the Canadian Northern Society will decorate the Station. It's a good reminder of how much of an anchor our building is on Big Valley's Main Street.

Over the past several months some new interpretive signage has gone up along the Stettler Sub at Warden and Fenn, and the new station has arrived at Warden. Over the winter I will be cutting the brush back at the Warden water tank and around the old foundations in preparation for more signage.

The first run of plenty of round trips from Stettler to the North Pole on the Polar Express began November 24, bringing smiles to the faces on the kids and adults alike. For more information visit www.absteamtrain.com.

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

~ Richard Graydon, CNoS Director, Big Valley

A BIG VALLEY CHRISTMAS STORY (BIG VALLEY JOURNAL, DECEMBER 31, 1924)

I have a good tale to tell. Far across the snow-covered, glistening hills, not north, but slightly east by south—southeast, there lies a snug little farmhouse. Like or unlike other snug little farmhouses, this one has a barn, a barnyard and a fence.

The barn is to keep mules in, the barnyard is to let mules out in, and the fence is to keep mules that are out in...Get that?

This story would not have been written had the last function been performed properly, that is, had the fence kept the mules that were out in, they wouldn't have got out.

To make a short story longer, one of the mules—wait a minute, I forgot the Xmas part of it. The fence poles were originally little Xmas trees that grew where little Xmas trees usually grow. They were stripped of their green tresses, or glory, or "what have you", and were set up in rows about the snug little farm house's barnyard. Two of the former little Xmas trees patriotically, or loyally or accidentally deserted their original I I I position and fell over forming the X that as you all know, children is the main part of Xmas.

Now for the "mas" part of Xmas, that's got to be explained too, I suppose. The master—there it is, massa, mas' for short, of this little snug farmhouse, owned a position on the Canadian National Railways. The mule we mentioned before, seeing his massa leaving for work, and with an eye perhaps on a luscious Xmas feed of grain doors, jumped over the x in the fence and followed his mas' to work.

At this job at the Big Valley roundhouse, poor muley got caught between piles of grain door lumber in deep white, snowy snowflakes and proceeded to freeze to death until rescued by the first aid squad of the Bridge and Building crew of the railroad who returned the mule to his master, who in turn led the suffering animal into the machine shop to thaw out slowly.

Now a word about the shop for the uninitiated. During extremely cold weather steam, ordinarily invisible, becomes a heavy dense fog and when mixed with a generous dose of smoke, generated by the celebrated fuel known as "hay-coal" this fog becomes a mass of oily, thick, black vapour that our electric lighting system is positively unable to penetrate, so dense in fact, that a lighted lamp held at arm's length cannot be seen.

It was in this impenetrable atmosphere that our boiler mechanic chose to perform some duty or other at the same bench to which our Xmas mule was tied. Busily hammering at a pocket or something for the 2137, our worthy brother felt a tap on his shoulder which made him glance around casually into the horribly smirking face of the Xmas mule. The mule no doubt was actuated by the well-known impulse peculiar to mules and birds, and also he no doubt meant well, but the feelings of our working brother are beyond my feeble powers of description. Anyhow the Xmas mule performed his duty. He made even our much worried Locomotive Chief's laugh ring out right merrily.

As another season closes, I would like to thank our volunteers and members who contribute to our efforts all year long.

From baking to building, donating to decorating, research and writing—you all make a difference!

Please continue to support the

Canadian Northern Society's efforts with a 2018 membership.



Thank you to our directors—with special mention to Glenys Smith in Camrose, Shawn, Karen, Liam and Adam Smith in Meeting Creek and Richard Graydon in Big Valley—who work tirelessly all year long to keep up our sites. Thank you to the Board Members and to our Managing Director, Norm Prestage, who has been a great asset to the society this past year.

From my home to yours, may you have good cheer, great hope and the best that the Christmas season has to offer for you and your family as you celebrate this time of togetherness. Merry Christmas!

- Lorrie Fiegs, Society President

HANNA ROUNDHOUSE UPDATE

The Hanna Roundhouse Society would like to thank Larry Potter for working on a CN Speeder donated to us! Within two-days Larry and our Vice President, Walter Alksne, had the speeder running up and down on the portion of track we have on our property. Thank you also to the Canadian Northern Society for arranging for our track inspection which has allowed us to offer mini rides next year!

With the crazy wind we had this year, we recently received damage to our Boiler Room roof. A patch made many years ago over the boiler stack holes, blew off! So, now funds which were raised to resurface the upper deck (6,800 ft²) of the first five bays of the roundhouse, are now required to build a temporary (up to 10 years) repair for the entire boiler room roof. This is required to prevent further deterioration to the wooden roof timbers and lumber not adequately protected from moisture, with the existing, over-weathered, aged roof membrane.

If any readers are interested in helping with our repairs and donating to the Hanna Roundhouse Society Roof Repair project, you can make your donation payable to Hanna Roundhouse Society, PO Box 1267, Hanna, AB T0J 1P0.

On behalf of the Hanna Roundhouse Society, I would like to wish all supporters of the Canadian Northern Society and the Hanna Roundhouse Society, a very Merry Christmas and a Happy, Healthy, Prosperous New Year! You are helping save Alberta Railroad history!

~ Sandra Beaudoin, President, Hanna Roundhouse Society

ALONG THESE LINES

Since 1986, volunteers with the Canadian Northern Society (www.canadian-northern.ca) have been researching and preserving the heritage related to a railway corridor in central Alberta, referred to by historians as the Canadian Northern Railway's Battle River Subdivision. This railway was opened for service in 1911 between Vegreville and Drumheller, and was primarily built to move carloads from the coal mines of the Drumheller Valley to western Canadian markets. Today, large portions of this railway have faded into history, however portions remain operational through Camrose (part of CN's Edmonton to Calgary main line) and between Stettler and Big Valley, featuring steam powered railway excursions operated by Alberta Prairie Railway.

The Canadian Northern Society has thoughtfully preserved four representative examples of heritage railway stations along the line—including an expanded Third Class design at Camrose, a standard Third Class station at Meeting Creek, a beautiful Second Class station at Big Valley, and a Fourth Class depot at Donalda, which was donated to the Donalda and District Museum Society in 1998. In addition, the Society has preserved a century-old Alberta Pacific Grain Elevator at Meeting Creek, and several other historical rail structures including the historic remnants of the Big Valley Roundhouse, section bunkhouses, toolhouses, and a shelter from Battle, south of Camrose.

Over 25 years ago, Society Vice President Leslie S. Kozma began researching and documenting the interesting history of the Battle River Subdivision, leading to a book known as *Along These Lines* which featured railway history and personal recollections of rail operations along the corridor.

In today's digital age, Canadian Northern Society has partnered up with Alberta Prairie Railway out of Stettler, Alberta—and information on the Society's website allows the thousands of guests who ride the excursion road's trains each season to follow the route between Stettler and Big Valley, and learn more about its

fascinating history. The society plans to augment further historical data on the route on its website in the future.

To celebrate Confederation's 150th anniversary, Canadian Northern Society volunteers led by President Lorrie Tieg developed illustrative interpretive signs marking the location of the Caprona water tank, the Fenn station, and the 1919 Warden Third Class station along the Stettler to Big Valley passenger route, to complement the on-line research work of Mr. Kozma. And to cap the project off, a small representative station was built entirely by volunteers and contributed labour at the Camrose station using recycled materials, original windows from the Warden and Meeting Creek stations, and the original station sign from Warden. The Warden station was moved to the site on September 25, 2017—and sits on the original location of the 1919 Warden station.

This station will add colour to the unique preserved Canadian Northern Railway route between Big Valley and

Stettler owned and preserved by the East Central Alberta Heritage Society. It will be used for educational and interpretive purposes and is part of the Canadian Northern Society's continued mission of Capturing History while Building Community.

The Canadian Northern Society acknowledges the entire group of volunteers involved with the Along These Lines project—including Donnie Loewen, Norm Prestage, the late Bruce Smith, Glenys Smith, Richard Graydon, Liam and Adam Smith, S.I. Smith, Leslie S. Kozma, Dean and Lorrie Tieg, Jeremiah Overland, Terry Bowles, Bill Walker, Ron Girard and Canadian Northern Plains Rail Services for their significant contributions to the project in 2017.

Sincere thanks to Don Gillespie and Alberta Prairie Railway for installing the interpretive signs at Warden, Fenn, and Caprona, and for supplying the tractor to prepare the property at Warden for the arrival of the mini-depot.



L to R: Jeremiah Overland, Richard Graydon, and Paul Van de Voorde stand by the newly placed Warden station.

Photos: Norm Prestage & Rich Graydon

CAMROSE HAPPENINGS

Another summer gone! It was busy, fun, and a great education for me!

Our interpretive Linear Park trail signage in Meeting Creek is installed, thanks to Bill Walker, Jeremiah Overland, Donny Loewen and Glenys Smith. One sign remains to be finished in the spring.

Thank you to John Soch of Hay Lakes for the donation of Maintenance of Way tools. Thank you to Ed Woelk of Tofield for the donation of signs, a chair and paper memorabilia of his time as a CPR conductor. A very special thank you (from me) to Sharon Berezan of Tofield for the donation of a desk originally in the Camrose station, and at which I'm now writing this note. We have also had many wonderful donations to the White Elephant Gift Shop, just in time for our pre-Christmas sales. Thank you all!

We've now said farewell to our students Amielle Christopherson, Jennifer Laskosky and Hanna Snider. We've enjoyed their company, youthful enthusiasm, and hope they had an educational, enjoyable summer with us.

We had a great turnout for "Isle of Sodor Day" (photos below), with excited kids and grown-up kids. The garden railway ran well and attracted lots of attention. Special thanks to Joe Hartunger, Terry Bowles and Garry Middleton.

Our Canada 150 Garden Party was well-attended in spite of the cool, blustery day, and we enjoyed the music of the Station Swing Band and assorted sweets. Hard to believe the band has been with us for 17 years now! During the gala, we also displayed a number of period wedding dresses in the upstairs of the station. Prairie Fun Days in Meeting Creek attracted about 70 people plus a busload from the county. The chili and Sunny Boy bread and pies went over well, as did the poetry of Jeff Strandquist. Thank you to all of our volunteers and staff who helped at these events.

A major project this summer was the construction of a small operator's cabin/flag station for Warden. Jeremiah Overland, Donny Loewen, Terry Bowles, Bill Walker and Ron Girard were involved in this, as well as the summer students on occasion. It was transported to Warden with the assistance of Simons Trucking, and installed by Rich Graydon, Paul Van de Voorde and Jeremiah Overland. It will be used for interpretation by Alberta Prairie Railway on their trips. It sits at the location of the former Third Class station at the junction of the Brazeau Sub.

The Camrose station is now decorated inside and out for the Christmas season with thanks to Carol Roy, Sharon Ofrim, Glenys Smith, Garry Middleton and Barb McDonald. It looks lovely...very inviting and homey. Our annual Cookie Walk was held on December 2 and as always was a great success. The gift shop is open on select days for the Christmas season. We also have several private events booked for the Christmas season.

We anticipate holding our Society Volunteer Appreciation night on the January 27, 2018, with a western/cowboy theme. Happy Christmas to all, and until next time...

~ Norm Prestage, Managing Director



IN MEMORIAM



On June 4, 2017, The Canadian Northern Society lost a fundamental member when **BRUCE SMITH** passed at the age of 78. Bruce was born at Trochu, Alberta, to George and Bertha Smith on June 23, 1939, and throughout his life called Wimborne, Brooks, Bassano, Carstairs, Stettler, Lloydminster, Calgary

and Camrose home. It was at both Stettler—during his high school and adult years—and at Camrose where he made lasting friendships and community contributions.

Bruce and Glenys moved to Camrose in 1998 and for several years lived in the Camrose Railway Station living quarters as they became the full-time caretakers and directors of the Camrose Heritage Railway Station and Park site. Bruce worked tirelessly on the Morgan Garden Railway, building track and replica miniature Canadian Northern buildings for the garden. Bruce kept the grounds looking great, upkept all the buildings and could be found many days in his workshop working on items for the park site. The above photo is Bruce and his grandson Adam preparing the Garden Railway trains for service in spring 2012. Bruce also spent many hours at the Meeting Creek Station and Elevator site on general maintenance and upkeep as well as the development of the Linear Park. He has left a lasting legacy for his grand-, and great-grandchildren as well as all who visit the sites each season. Bruce is deeply missed by all who knew and worked along side him.

It is with heavy hearts that the family of **G.F. "FRED" FOWLER** announced his passing on November 2, 2017, at Youville Home in St. Albert. Fred was 91 years old—a brilliant railroader, a charter member of our Canadian Northern Society, and an ardent supporter.

Our publication *Along These Lines* features interesting stories that Fred had told over the years of his days as an agent-operator on CN—which began at Rowley in 1943 and ended with his retirement at St. Paul in 1986, which is the very day the photo attached was taken. The railway was always a huge part of Fred's life—and the preservation of the Big Valley depot in particular took on real sentimental meaning to him, having been the station where his family lived in the late 1940s, and from which his father took his retirement. Fred would often visit Big Valley and was a regular Alberta Prairie Railway passenger in the 1990s. In 1993 he rode the train to Rowley on the 50th anniversary of his first day on the CNR—at that very station.

Fred's father, George F. Fowler Sr., came west during an exciting time in CNR history, and as an operator with the Grand Trunk Pacific at Tête Jaune, he witnessed the early days of operations of the Grand Trunk Pacific and Canadian Northern parallel lines west of Edmonton to Mount Robson. After amalgamation with the Canadian Northern, Mr. Fowler Sr. would end up as agent at Marlboro, Alberta, where he met his bride, and later came a family of four boys and four girls, which included Fred and his brother Bill—also a career railroader. Bill (WFF) would go on to become a well-known train dispatcher in Edmonton for many years.

Fred's career is intertwined with the old Battle River Subdivision, and Canadian Northern heritage lines. Born in the GTP depot at Ryley in 1926, his formative years saw him grow up at Rumsey, in a Third Class depot which was identical to the Meeting Creek station. Starting at Rowley in 1943 as a spare telegraph operator—and in addition to Oyen, Mantario, and Youngstown on the Goose Lake Line, he worked at Big Valley, Edberg, Meeting Creek, and Donalds in his first few years on the CNR. In 1948 Fred bid his first permanent agency on the Brazeau branch at Saunders. On days off he enjoyed riding his motorcycle "home" to Big Valley to visit his parents and family. It was on one of these visits he was sent on a run for eggs and cream to the Melnychyn farm south of town and he met his beautiful bride Anne. Following their marriage Fred bid the agent's job at Warden where the Fowlers stayed until 1953. Always having a great wit, Fred affectionately referred to the Warden station as "the Honeymoon Cottage" and indeed that is the nickname we've bestowed on today's mini-station in Fred's honour. Moving to Galahad, Vilna, Houston, BC, and then finally to St. Paul in 1965. Fred and his family lived in stations until 1982, long after most of these classic structures ceased to be used in most communities.

After a brief illness, **THOMAS PAYNE**—a pioneer in the Canadian short line railway industry passed away in October in Tacoma, WA, at the age of 68. Long-time members of the Canadian Northern Society will recall Tom as the founder of the Central Western Railway—and a key individual in the initial preservation of both Meeting Creek and Big Valley depots. Tom was a colourful, one-of-a-kind individual who loved railroading—and it was his vision and determination that resulted in the steam excursion business on the CWR that began in 1989—eventually leading to the creation of Alberta Prairie Railway Excursions.

Tom encouraged the founders of Canadian Northern Society in 1986 to carry on with the plans that were started with CN prior to sale of the Stettler Subdivision to preserve the Meeting Creek depot for future generations. His appreciation for our efforts led him to turning over the Big Valley station to the Society in 1989 for preservation as a historic site, and continued use as a railway office and facility. He was also responsible for re-acquiring the roundhouse lands and structures in Big Valley that would lead to this preservation effort. Tom's desire to see the railway once again become part of the fabric of the community can certainly be counted as one of his lasting achievements for today's APR route between Stettler and Big Valley. Tom spent his last year working on a tugboat preservation project in Washington state. Always fascinated by mechanics and steam-powered toys, Tom left this world doing what he wanted to do. We extend sympathies to Tom's family and friends, and expect to commemorate his memory in an appropriate manner in 2018.



Looking around Meeting Creek, Big Valley, Camrose, and Warden—Fred is remembered in the many trappings, photographs, and artifacts in our collection. He contributed the station scale and his own Underwood typewriter at Meeting Creek. In addition, some of his collectables such as station signs from St. Paul and Vilna are also displayed there. At Big Valley, there is the waiting bench from the Ashmont depot that Fred acquired in the seventies and refinished, together with the dispatchers phone from St. Paul, and numerous other artifacts. At Camrose there are station books, forms, and photographs that Fred wanted to ensure were left for “whoever would be interested.” He was always interested in Canadian Northern Society preservation activities, and was noted as the first to renew his membership for many years. His interesting stories documented in part in *Along These Lines* are testament to why we need to preserve “lives like Fred’s” in written form for future generations.

Fred was a proud member of the Royal Canadian Legion having spent his only break from service on the CNR in the Canadian Army late in the Second World War. As he liked to recall, he was about to be shipped out on two occasions—once to Germany and once to Japan—but the war ended before he “could get shot at!” As a historian, friend, and railroader—he was a big part of our overall community and organization and will be deeply missed.

CANADIAN NORTHERN SOCIETY 5 – 10 YEAR PLAN

The Canadian Northern Society executive held an excellent planning meeting in October to discuss the development of a 5 – 10 year project plan for our historic structures. An attempt was made to prioritize work felt to be “relatively expensive” but required for the continued preservation of our unique collection of heritage buildings which generally is now well-over 100 years old.

Discussion centred around four key continued priorities for our Society:

1. Meeting Creek and Big Valley railway heritage sites – Both of these sites are considered of exceptional historical importance – both regionally and nationally. It was agreed that the overall preservation of the group of historic resources at each site needs to be taken into context for planning purposes, rather than focusing on each resource individually. For example – the Meeting Creek depot is of exceptional historic value because of its original location, and the rare fact that it has been preserved with a 1917 grain elevator, and a portion of original Canadian Northern Railway – both of these resources largely unmodified. Similarly, Big Valley station with its adjacent rail yard, station grounds, and roundhouse/divisional point facilities, is unique in Canada – especially in consideration of the adjacent grain elevator preservation conducted so very well over the years by the Big Valley Historical Society.

As we are facing longer term structural and expense issues with all of the above resources – for example the foundation and roof on the Meeting Creek station, the driveshed and foundation on the Meeting Creek elevator, and the condition of concrete on the Big Valley roundhouse – we need a longer term plan to identify the key issues, tasks to be conducted, and the costs associated with same. We can then begin the fundraising and outreach process.

2. Camrose Railway Park – The park represents a unique collection of artifacts and structures vs. the more intrinsic historic sites at Meeting Creek and Big Valley. Fortunately, the focus at Camrose is less on structural issues given the excellent condition of the station and that it sits on a modern foundation, and more on developing a sustainable interpretive and educational approach, together with maintaining the extensive and popular railway gardens.

3. Research, Interpretation, and Historical Signage – Researching and presenting the history of the Canadian Northern Railway is considered a key activity for our society – and ensuring that this research can be used for educational and community benefit is a continued objective for us. Identification of an optimum “historic region” (i.e. the Battle River Subdivision, and certain places of key historic importance to the

Canadian Northern elsewhere) for our signage program is to be refined in the plan – together with opportunities for shared cost on sign installation and maintenance. The 5- 10 year plan will include provision for continued development of material on our website, new and replacement interpretive signage, and educational opportunities partnering with Alberta Prairie Railway on historic rail operations using in particular the Warden station and a move to a more guided interpretive approach at the Big Valley site in the future.

4. Developing Coalitions – Canadian Northern Society wants to be a recognized and respected leader in historical preservation and building community. In our case that community can be spread over those wishing to accomplish similar objectives with their own focused plan, but with similar challenges. Part of our long term plan is to continue our leadership in this area – however in a manner that is focused on the addressing the priorities we identify in items 1-3.

The plan is open to contribution and participation by all members of the Canadian Northern Society.

We strongly encourage participation by anyone interested, and welcome your views.

The *Canora Chronicle* is the tri-annual newsletter of the Canadian Northern Society—a registered charity dedicated to providing community service through heritage tourism initiatives.

Canadian Northern Society, P.O. Box 1174, Camrose, AB T4V 1X2 / Ph: (780) 672-3099 / Email: canadiannorthern@telus.net

Editors: Dean and Lorrie Tiegs / Email: secretary@canadiannorthern.ca; Regular Contributor: Shawn Smith